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U.S. EPA to sample indoor air at Santa Rosa homes, elementary school near dry cleaning shop

VOCs found underground in Santa Rosa

SAN FRANCISCO – On Saturday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will begin testing inside several homes and at an elementary school after preliminary results from soil vapor sampling indicate volatile organic compounds have been found close to the surface near a dry cleaning facility in Santa Rosa, Calif.

The EPA, on behalf of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, will sample the indoor air over a 24-hour period in homes and at the Steele Lane Elementary School to see if contaminants in the soil and groundwater have migrated from the Peter Pan Cleaners at 2231 Mendocino Ave., and are accumulating indoors. The contaminants are the result of past practices at the facility and are no longer used at this location.

"As a precaution, the EPA wants to make sure VOCs are not building up in homes and at the school," said Donn Zuroski, the EPA's on-scene coordinator. "The EPA is working with the regional board and DTSC to monitor the air, and if needed, will take the necessary steps until the situation is remedied."

The EPA expects preliminary results back in approximately one week.

Contamination in the soil, soil vapor and groundwater in areas near the Peter Pan Cleaners consists of VOCs, which can move from underground and come up through the soil if conditions are right. If VOCs move under a home or other building, it is possible for vapors to come up through cracks in foundations and accumulate inside. If this happens, and if the levels of VOCs are high enough, it can create a health hazard for residents, especially children or pregnant women.

The presence of tetrachloroethylene, or PCE, in groundwater was discovered in 2002 when a private water supply well on Rowe Drive in Santa Rosa was tested for VOCs. Subsequent historical and physical investigative work identified Peter Pan Cleaners as the source of the PCE contamination. PCE is a chemical typically used in the dry cleaning industry.

DTSC is the lead agency overseeing the groundwater investigation and cleanup project, and will assume the cleanup following the EPA's investigation. The regional board directed the dry cleaners to investigate the subsurface contamination problem. Groundwater studies led to a recent soil vapor study, where near-surface soil vapor -- chlorinated solvents, PCE and related compounds -- results indicate a potential for vapor intrusion into nearby homes and the school.

Drinking water comes from municipal sources, and is not affected by the groundwater contamination from this area.

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